

## **New Life in Christ**

### **Lesson 19: Building Right Relationships (Part 1)**

**Key Verse:** *"He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed."* Proverbs 13:20

**Loneliness has been called the most prevalent problem of our time. This world is filled with lonely people. A person may be surrounded by people and yet be lonely because he does not have any real friends.**

Why do we have such a deep need for friends? The reason is that we were made with a need for friendships and relationships. Concerning the man which He had created, God said, *"It is not good that the man should be alone."* (Genesis 2:18) We are social beings and we need the companionship and encouragement of friends. To feel lonely and rejected can make life almost unbearable.

**In this lesson we will learn** a very important principle regarding friendships. We will learn how we can build right relationships.

#### **The Influence of Friends**

**All friendships are not alike.** Concerning our relationships with others, we should understand that there are different levels of friendships:

**1 - acquaintance**

**2 - casual friendship**

**3 - close friendship**

**4 - intimate friendship**

**We are not greatly influenced** by acquaintances and casual friends, but we are influenced by those we choose as our close and intimate friends.

This brings us to an important principle regarding friendships: **We become like those we choose as our friends.**

There are some associations over which we have no control. These associations usually have little influence over us. But the people we choose as our friends—those with whom we voluntarily spend our free time—do influence us greatly. This influence will be good or bad depending on the character of these people. The Bible says,

*"He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed."*  
Proverbs 13:20

#### **Some Friendships should be Avoided**

**When we see our need for friendships** we may think that we need all the *"friends"* we can get. But this is not so. It is better to have no friends than to have the wrong kind of friends. The Bible tells us plainly that we are to avoid certain friendships:

### **1 -We must avoid close friendships with unbelievers.**

**When a person is first saved**, he usually has a number of unsaved friends. These unsaved friends present a real danger to a new Christian. The danger is that they will draw him away from God and back into the world. You cannot maintain a deep friendship with an unbeliever without being influenced by him and adopting some of his views and ways. The Bible says,

*"Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits." 1 Corinthians 15:33 (NKJ)*

You may still love a former friend, but your aim now should be to lead him to Christ. After a time, if he continues to reject Christ, you must not maintain a close friendship with him. If you do, you will be pulled down.

**Once a young lady** came to see the great preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon. She told him of a deep friendship she had with an unbelieving young man. She said that her aim was to lead him to Christ and that she had decided to be engaged to him fairly soon.

Since she was seeking his advice, Spurgeon asked the young lady to stand on a table. Then he told her to grasp his hand and try her best to pull him up onto the table. She tried, but of course could not do it.

Then Spurgeon said, *"Now watch what happens when I pull you."* With just one pull, she came down.

Spurgeon then said, *"It is easy to be pulled down, but hard to pull someone up."* At once the girl saw what would happen in this relationship with the unsaved man.

**We say again:** You must not seek to maintain a deep relationship with an unsaved person. If you do, there can be but one result: **You will be pulled down.**

### **2 - We must avoid friendships with scoffers and "fools."**

**God warns us** against friendships with scoffers and *"fools."* The word *"fool"* in the Bible does not refer to a mentally deficient person but rather to one who has a rebellious attitude toward God and His Word. Scoffers are those who make fun of the things of God and scoff at the Bible. We are to avoid associating with such people. David said,

*"How blessed is the one who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of scoffers!" Psalm 1:1 (NET Bible)*

If we want God's blessing upon our life, we should not seek or accept the advice of the wicked. We should not *"stand in the pathway with sinners"*—that is, we should not go to the places to which they go. And we should not *"sit in the assembly of scoffers"*—that is, we should not fellowship with those who make fun of the Bible and show contempt for the things of God.

### 3 - We must avoid friendships with those who have certain character defects.

**The Bible not only warns** us against associating with scoffers and fools, but it also warns us against making friendships with people who have certain character defects.

- **The gossip.** This is the kind of person who always has unfavorable news about someone which he passes on with great delight. The Bible says,

*"He who goes about as a talebearer [gossiper] reveals secrets: therefore do not associate with [him]..." Proverbs 20:19*

- **The critical and discontent.** Beware of making friends with those who have a bitter and critical spirit, especially those who are resentful and rebellious toward those in authority. If you associate with them, they will pass this critical spirit on to you.

- **The quick-tempered.** The quick-tempered person does not know how to control his anger. If you associate with him, you will learn his ways. The Bible says,

*"Do not make friends with an angry person, and do not associate with a wrathful person, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare." Proverbs 22:24-25 (NET Bible)*

- **The immoral.** The Bible tells us to avoid associating with immoral people. (See *Proverbs 7*.) If I associate with those whose standards and conduct are contrary to God's Word, I am on the pathway to destruction. Over and over again, the Bible brings home this message: **We become like those whom we choose as our friends.**

### Learn to say "No"

**To have the right kind of friends,** you must say "**No**" to the wrong kind of friends. The great lesson God wants us to learn from the book of Proverbs is this: *Do not allow other people to entice you into doing wrong.* The Bible says,

*"My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent." Proverbs 1:10*

One of the most important words we can learn to say is the tiny, two letter word "**No**." We must learn to say it lovingly, firmly, and finally.

**When you are asked** to do something that would violate your God-given convictions, say "**No**" and, at the same time, identify with Jesus Christ. That should end the matter. Here is an example of what we mean:

**Friend:** *"Come on, let's do so-and so."*

**You:** (Smile) *"No, thank you."*

**Friend:** *"Aw, why not?"*

**You:** (Smile) *"Because I have committed my life to Jesus Christ."*

**Before Tom became a Christian,** he enjoyed drinking beer with his friends in the local beer joint. Then Tom became a Christian and things were different. He no longer wanted to go to the

beer joint. His friends didn't like this. They teased and nagged Tom until he gave in. Soon he was running around with his old drinking buddies again. That gave Satan the chance he was waiting for.

One night, Tom and his friends played "*chicken*." Tom lost. The car rolled over and then smashed. Tom's friends dragged him out of the back seat and stretched him out on the ground. They were too drunk to realize that they should have waited for the medics to move him.

**Tom's back was broken** just below the neck. He spent many days in the hospital with heavy weights on his hips, legs, and arms. Tortuous days and long dreary nights followed each other in weary succession.

Now Tom uses a wheelchair to get around. He will never walk again. He has artificial limbs to try to take the place of the hands that are there but unable to function.

**Did he come back** to the Lord? I don't know. I just know how he suffered and how I suffered with him. I was his night nurse in the hospital. (*story from Joyce Dix*)

The Friendships We Need

**We have seen how the wrong kind** of friends can influence us in the wrong way. It is also true that the right kind of friends can influence us for good. But how do we get the right kind of friends?

We tend to think that having the right kind of friend depends on our meeting the right kind of person. But God's Word shows us that it depends more on our being the right kind of person. In other words, to have the right kind of friend, I must *be* the right kind of friend.

**Let us consider now** the qualities we want and need in a true friend. As we consider each of these qualities, let us ask ourselves, "*Am I this kind of person? Do I have this quality in my life?*"

- I need a friend who loves the Lord Jesus.

**Since we become** like those we choose as our friends, we should see to it that our best friends are those who know and love the Lord Jesus. David, the man after God's own heart, chose his friends wisely. David said,

*"I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts." Psalm 119:63*

- I need a friend who loves and accepts me.

**One of my deepest needs** is that of being loved and accepted by someone who is important to me. A noted psychologist said,

*At all times in our lives, we must have at least one person who cares for us and whom we care for ourselves. If we do not have this person, we will not be able to fulfil our basic needs. (William Glasser in "Reality Therapy")*

When we have a friend who loves and accepts us just as we are, it sets us free to enjoy the relationship. To have this kind of friend, I must be this kind of friend.

· I need a friend who shares my burdens.

**A true friend** is willing to become involved with my problems and to share my burdens. If I want this kind of friend, I must be a friend who shares the burdens of others. The Bible says,

*"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2*

· I need a friend who is loyal to me.

**One of the marks** of a true friend is that he is there when you need him. You can count on him. Am I this kind of person?

· I need a friend who encourages.

**We all need** encouragement. Someone has said, *"We live by encouragement and die without it, slowly, sadly, and angrily."* Do I encourage others?

· I need a friend who is trustworthy.

**A solid friendship** is based on mutual trust and confidence. If I want a friend whom I can trust, I must be trustworthy.

· I need a friend who is honest with me.

**A true friend** is one who is lovingly honest with me—one who cares for me enough to correct me. The Bible says,

*"Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Proverbs 27:6*

· I need a friend who is thoughtful of me.

**Thoughtfulness** is a quality that we appreciate in others. Likewise, we may be sure that others appreciate this quality in us. Am I thoughtful of others?

## **Building Right Relationships**

**We have seen the qualities** that we need in a friend. Now let us consider the **attitudes** on our part that will help us build right relationships.

### **1 - "I accept myself."**

**If I have not** accepted myself, I will find it difficult to have friends and to share my faith with others.

To accept myself does not mean that I believe I am all I want to be or should be. It simply means that I see myself as a worthwhile person, created by God, redeemed by God, and precious to God. As I learn to think this way about myself, I will be able to accept others and to express God's love to them.

### **2 - "I accept you."**

**Everyone** has the deep, inner need of being accepted. Showing others by my attitude and actions that I accept them opens the way for them to accept me.

### **3 - "I believe that you are valuable."**

**One reason** why people were attracted to Jesus was that He valued them. He did not consider any person to be unimportant. He saw every person as a special creation of God and exceedingly precious to Him.

4 - "I will express God's love toward you."

**Love is** the foundation upon which friendships are built. Whomever we meet, we can be sure that God loves them and that He wants us to express His love to them.

### **5 - "I will be friendly."**

**If we want** friends, we must be friendly. The Bible says,

*"A man who has friends must show himself friendly." (Proverbs 18:24)*

### **6 - "I am interested in you."**

**You will make** more friends by becoming genuinely interested in other people than you can ever make by trying to get other people interested in you.

If we are constantly thinking about ourselves and what others think of us, we become uncomfortable and self-conscious around people. We need to ask God to set us free from ourselves so that we can reach out to other people with love and sincere interest. If your attitude needs changing, you can change it with God's help.

**One way** we show people that we care about them is by listening to them. A vital part of a good relationship is being able to share burdens and seek solutions to problems. This requires listening carefully without interrupting. It is important that we develop this ability. Poor listeners do not make good friends.

### **7 - "I will treat you as I want to be treated."**

**Jesus gave us** the golden rule in relating to other people. What is it? It is simply this: ***Treat others as you would like them to treat you.*** Jesus said,

*"Therefore whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them..." Matthew 7:12*

## **You Need True Friends**

**You need at least a few close friends** you can depend on. If you do not have them, ask God to direct you to those whom He would like to be your friends. Make it your purpose to be a true friend to them. As you do, you will find that they will become your true friends.

As we choose our friends, our main concern should be that those who will most deeply affect us are those who know and obey the Lord Jesus. The strongest and most lasting friendship between two people is one in which both are growing spiritually and are intent on following God and doing His will. **As both friends draw closer to God, they draw closer to each other.**

**Remember always** that the Lord Jesus is the Friend of friends. The Bible says, *"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* (Proverbs 18:24) Jesus Christ Himself is that friend, and He should be your closest and most intimate friend. As you spend time with Him, you will become like Him. The Bible says,

*"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NKJ)*

**Discovered Gem:** We become like those we choose as our friends.

### **Questions:**

1. Why is it an important principle regarding friendships is that we become like those we choose as our friends?
2. If you maintain a deep relationship with an unbeliever, you will be influenced by him/her and adopt some of his views and ways. How is this true?
3. If you are a strong believer can you maintain a deep relationship with an unbeliever?
4. Is a believer usually successful in 'pulling' an unbeliever up?
5. Define the strongest and most lasting friendship between two friends?
6. What has been called the most prevalent problem of our time?
7. According to Psalm 1:1 who is the person God blesses?
8. If I have not accepted myself, I will find it difficult to have friends and to share my faith with others. How is this true?
9. What does it take to have the right kind of friend?
10. What is a true friend is willing to become involved with and share?